

MY DEAR SIR,—

I have your letter. I had learned, before receiving it, of the report in Buffalo, during the late Convention there, that I was in favor of the nomination of Mr. Van Buren, and would vote for him.

I hardly need say, that I am deeply interested in the present movement against the extension of slavery; and that I infinitely prefer the election of the candidates, who are identified with it, to the election of the Whig and Democratic candidates. Gen. Taylor and Gen. Cass are proslavery candidates. Mr. Van Buren and Mr. Adams are antislavery candidates. The former are the shameless tools of the slave-power. The latter bravely resist it.

It is true, that, among all the persons, whom there was the least reason to believe the Buffalo Convention would nominate for President, Mr. Van Buren was my preference. He was my preference, because I believed he would obtain a much larger vote than any of the others; and, that his nomination would go much farther than that of any of the others toward breaking up the great political parties, which, along with the great ecclesiastical parties, are the chief shelters and props of slavery.

But, it is not true, that I shall vote for Mr. Van Buren. I can vote for no man for President of the United States, who is not an abolitionist; for no man, who votes for slaveholders, or for those, who do; for no man, whose understanding and heart would not prompt him to use the office, to the utmost, for the abolition of slavery. And, let me here confess, that I am not of the number of those, who believe, that the Federal Government has no higher power over slavery than to abolish it in the District of Columbia, and to abolish the inter State traffic in human beings. On the contrary, I claim, that this Government has power, under the Constitution, to abolish every part of American slavery, whether without, or within, the States; and that it is superlatively guilty against God and man for refusing thus to use it. The still higher ground do I take, that no man is fit for President of the United States, who does not scout the idea of the possibility of property in man, and who does not insist, that slavery is as utterly incapable of legalization, as is murder itself. Why is it not? Is it not as bad as murder? Is not, indeed, murder itself one of the elements in that matchless compound of enormous crimes? If not strictly that, it is, at least, a part of its necessary operation. The murder—the distinct, technical murder—of slaves occurs daily in this land. Why should it not, seeing, that it is unpunished? True, there are laws against it. But, laws for putting a man to death for doing what he will with those whom the laws themselves reduce to mere chattels—laws for destroying a man, because he has destroyed things—do, of course, remain unexecuted. Hence, there should be no surprise, that, from the day this Nation came into being until the present day, no white man has, in any one of the Southern States, been put to death, under the laws, for the murder of a slave.

Laws are for the *protection* of rights. That is no law, which, like the enactments for slavery, is for the *destruction* of rights. And, yet, our Judges sit in Court, and wait patiently on the lawyers, who are engaged in hunting up authorities for slavery—in hunting up authorities, not for the comparatively petty crime of sheep, or horse, stealing, but for the unpunished crime of man-stealing. Our enlightened posterity will wonder, that we should have called such a Court “a Court of Justice”;—and they will wonder, that our Judges, instead of exercising such patience toward these lawyers, did not commit them to prison “for contempt of Court.” But, our enlightened posterity will have no cause to wonder at our characteristically light respect for law. For why should it be expected, that a people should manifest a deep and devout regard for law, who are patient under the attempt, and even unite in the attempt, to clothe with the obligation and sacredness of law such an abomination, as slavery?

Whilst on the topic of slavery, I will add, that no man is fit for President, whose heart has not welcomed the doctrine of the human brotherhood, and the doctrine of the perfect equality of all men, in both their political and social rights. He, who would rob colored persons of the right of suffrage, or make their complexion a bar to the equality of their rights with white persons, in the school, or the house of worship, or elsewhere, is not worthy to be a civil ruler. From such a one impartiality toward all, who come under his rule, is not to be expected.

Severe as these tests of fitness for civil office may be in the esteem of many, they are, nevertheless, not new. The Liberty Party acknowledged them, and contended for them, until the last year, when the great majority of its members adopted the policy of nominating for the Presidency a gentleman, who, great as is his worth, and rapid as is his progress in antislavery truth, had never given evidence of holding a single one of the distinguishing doctrines of the Liberty Party. In adopting that unprincipled and ruinous policy, they, manifestly, abandoned these tests, and abandoned the Liberty Party. And, now, in taking up Mr. Van Buren, they are but repeating this abandonment; and are guilty of no new, and no greater, wrong. It is no greater violation of Liberty Party principles to nominate Mr. Van Buren, than it was to nominate Mr. Hale:—and they, who swung their hats over Mr. Hale's nomination, are guilty of no inconsistency in swinging them over Mr. Van Buren's. Mr. Van Buren would be no quicker than Mr. Hale to resent the charge of representing the unpopular and reviled doctrines of the Liberty Party. The reproach of these doctrines, and of membership in the Liberty Party, the one would shun, as quickly as the other. But, thanks to our Heavenly Keeper, the Liberty Party is, not yet, deserted by all its members. A few of them remain, to preserve its name, and uphold and honor its principles. Moreover, many of those, who, through their impatience for numbers and results, have forsaken it, will, ere long, return to it. Their delusion will soon spend itself: and their remembered backslidings will but serve to reattach them the more closely to the truths they had betrayed.

Should I close my letter here, I might leave you under the impression, that it is on the subject of slavery only, that I require soundness in my candidate. It is true, that I do not expect perfection in him—nor even so much, as an entire agreement with my erring self. But, I must insist on having evidence, that he will, if elected, aim, honestly and intelligently, to carry out, in all directions, the principle of the equal rights of all men. Such evidence, however, I cannot have, if the claims of the poor white man do not, as well as the claims of the poor black man, come within the scope of his regards. I cannot have it, if he be not opposed to monopolies, and especially, to that monopoly, which, with distinguished ability, you are laboring to overthrow. I can vote for no man for President, who is not sound on the subject of Land-Monopoly; and who is not ready to devote himself, “arm and soul,” to the abolition of this evil, which is so gigantic in itself, and which makes room for numerous and no less gigantic evils.—It is not enough, that the candidate agree with the Land Reformers, in respect to one or more of their measures. Their principles, and, especially, that of “HOMES FOR ALL,” must be in him; and it must be certainly known, that to the success of these principles he consecrates his influence, whether private or official. Nothing can be more obvious to him, who will reflect upon it, than that the right of every person to the soil is perfect—as perfect as to the sea, the light, the air;—and that the denial of this right accounts for no small share of the world's misery. When, if not now, shall we take our stand, in behalf of this right? For several years, the Land Reformers have been filling the country with arguments, which prove this right, conclusively and triumphantly. The Irish famine, which is to be traced, so distinctly, to Land-Monopoly, was most opportune for illustrating and commending these arguments. Shall we wait, until these arguments and the horrors of that famine have faded from the public memory, ere we insist, that Civil Government shall protect every person in the assertion of his right—his natural and absolute right—to his needed portion of the soil? We may then be unable to re-arouse the public mind! Moreover, having failed to make just and Heaven-demanded applications of the truth, we may (—for such is a frequent consequence of unfaithfulness to the truth—) have no heart left for re-inculcating it.

I, hardly, need say, that I am an abolitionist. But, abolitionist though I am, I regard Land-Monopoly, take the world together, as a far more abundant source of suffering and debasement, than is Slavery:—and, I add, that, whilst to abolish chattel-slavery is not to abolish land-monopoly, to abolish land-monopoly is to abolish chattel-slavery.

I am well aware, that but few are left to govern their votes by such considerations, as govern my own: Of the seventy thousand, who belonged to the Liberty Party, perhaps, not one thousand will insist, that their candidates be abolitionists: and of all the Land-Reformers, perhaps, not one thousand will insist, that their candidates be Land-Reformers. When I see such wise and good men,

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as compose the Faculty of Oberlin Institute, adapting their ethics to the emergency, and teaching, that the Civil Ruler may, in most respects, be a man of negative, instead of positive merits—and that, even in such antislavery matters, as are, confessedly, "important," it will answer, if he only do not "stand committed against" the right—when I see such a sad surrender of principle, I expect nothing better than that but here and there one will be found able to keep himself from being carried off in the floods of defection.

Alas, that even the wise and the good should entertain such low and false views of Civil Government! But, it is not strange that they should. Ministers refuse to preach Bible politics; and if a layman presume to preach them, Ministers and their people conspire against him for his unpardonable offence. God's is a positive character. He is not indifferent, or undecided, in respect, either to the right, or the wrong. He is for the right, and against the wrong, always, and every where. And so should be the Civil Ruler in the sphere of politics, where he is the representative—"the minister of God."

But, I have detained you too long. If you have the curiosity to learn more of my views of the uses of Civil Government, and of the qualifications of the Civil Ruler, you may learn it from a pamphlet just printed by S. W. Green of Utica. The pamphlet contains the proceedings of the National Liberty Party Convention, held in Buffalo, last June.

In conclusion, let me say, that I, many years ago, became deeply convinced of the impropriety of determining the candidate's fitness for office, by interrogating him. If a man's life and character, before his nomination, do not afford the evidence of his fitness for office, I would not allow, that he supply the lack, when in nomination.

With great regard, your friend,

GERRIT SMITH.